

DEC 23 1997

THE BAPTIST

Record

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION

#BXNFMXY
#00002915#
SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
901 COMMERCE ST STE 401
NASHVILLE TN 37203-36201
CARRIER ROUTE 39
005-DTM 12-18
SD0000

PUBLISHED SINCE 1877

DECEMBER 18, 1997

VOL. 121

No. 45

HELP!
THEIR CRY
OUR CALL

Lottie Moon Christmas
Offering for
International Missions
Goal: \$100,000,000

WHAT'S IN THE RECORD

25-day observance planned

Lottie at work in Miss.

Gambling tide turning?

Baptists unite in India

'CrossSeekers' gaining quick momentum

By Chip Alford
Baptist Sunday School Board

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—A discipleship initiative recently launched by Southern Baptists is already capturing the attention of college students across the country, generating hopeful comparisons to successful Christian movements such as "True Love Waits" and Promise Keepers.

Students at campuses as diverse as Mississippi State University (MSU) in Starkville and Washington State University in Pullman are getting involved in "CrossSeekers."

To date, more than 1,000 students have signed up to receive monthly updates about CrossSeekers via e-mail.

Student leaders at MSU's BSU are using the CrossSeekers covenant in a variety of settings.

"Family groups" of transfer students used it as a basis for their weekly Bible study and prayer times this fall, as did some of the BSU's FLEA (Fellowship, Leadership, Encouragement, and Accountability) groups.

Laurie Jones, a junior at MSU, said a professor recently noticed a CrossSeekers prayer tag she brought to class.

"He was really interested and asked if it was anything like Promise Keepers even before I got a chance to tell him anything," Jones said. "He wanted to know what each of the six statements in the covenant



IN PRAYER — Laura Pasiewicz (center), a junior at Mississippi State University (MSU) in Starkville, leads a prayer time for a "family group" of MSU transfer students who meet weekly for Bible study and prayer using the CrossSeekers covenant. (BP photo by Jim Veneman)

were. ... I pray that God gives me more chances to share."

Jones, who is active in her school's BSU, said she likes CrossSeekers because it challenges students to "stand up and be real."

"College students didn't need another Bible study. We didn't need another meeting," she explained. "What we need is a kick in the seat. And that's what the CrossSeekers covenant does. ... I can't think of a sin that the covenant doesn't

address. It's really a wake up call for college students."

"It helps me be accountable," agreed Dax Summerhill, MSU junior. "I have (the CrossSeekers covenant) up in my bathroom so I'll see it every day. Praying each part of the covenant, like 'Lord, help me be a person of integrity,' is a good way to start the day."

Ken Watkins, MSU BSU director, said he believes the CrossSeekers covenant can "help students see where they are 'clogged up in their spiritual life.' All of the points of the covenant stand before you and challenge you. They can help you keep your life in balance."

"This is one of the most awesome things I have heard of since Promise Keepers," said Heather Dendy, MSU sophomore. "Committing to CrossSeekers is a good way for college students to be seen outside the usual stereotype."

Students or those who work with college students can receive the weekly CrossSeekers e-mail update by sending a message to cschampion@bssb.com.

More information about CrossSeekers also will be available on the initiative's Internet site (www.crossseekers.org) which is expected to go live in January 1998.

Abortion on the rise?

ATLANTA (BP) — After five years of decline, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) announced Dec. 4 the U.S. abortion rate appeared to edge up in 1996.

While national statistics were not yet available for 1996, preliminary reports from state and local health departments suggest a five-year downward trend in the abortion rate has reversed, according to an article in the Dec. 5 New York Times.

The number of abortions in New York City jumped to 97,800 last year, up from 95,205 in 1995, The Times reported. In Florida, an 8.1% increase from 1995 was reported; in Texas, the increase was 4.7%; in Illinois, the numbers grew from 52,300 in 1995 to 53,613.

The latest figures come on the heels of 1995 CDC statistics that revealed continuing declines in the number of reported abortions since 1990.

The CDC reported just over 1.2 million abortions being performed in 1995, a drop of 4.5% from 1994 and a decline of 15% from a peak in 1990, and the lowest rate since 1975, The Times said. An estimated 35 million abortions have been performed since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court ruling legalizing abortion across the U.S..

The CDC and others have speculated that increased contraceptive use, "decreased access" to abortion services, and an aging population contributed to the decline.

Looking back

10 years ago

More than 40 moderate Southern Baptist Convention leaders meet at the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport to review events and "look for ways to retrieve our national convention from the hands of the fundamentalists," according to a press release issued after the meeting.

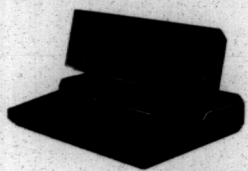
20 years ago

First Church, Columbia, pastor J. Roy McComb reverses the usual order of the offering by encouraging church members to take money from the church's offering plate and give it to needy people in the community. About \$2,500 is distributed.

50 years ago

Pastor A.E. Mason and the young people of South Side Church, Meridian, sponsor a "Young People's Spiritual Retreat" during the holidays. Guest speaker for the event is Clinton Marlow of Miami. All Lauderdale County youth are encouraged to attend.

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Postmaster: Send changes of address
to **THE BAPTIST RECORD**, P.O. Box
530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Send
news, communication, and address
changes to The Editor, **BAPTIST
RECORD**, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS
39205-0530 (601) 968-3800

VOLUME 121 NUMBER 45
(ISSN-0005-5778)

Published weekly except weeks of July 4
and Christmas by the Mississippi Baptist
Convention Board, 515 Mississippi Street,
Jackson, MS 39201. Subscription \$8.35 per
year payable in advance. Economy plans
available for cooperating Mississippi
churches. Periodicals postage paid at
Jackson, MS. Member, Association of State
Baptist Papers. Deadlines: News items —
one calendar week prior to requested pub-
lication date. Advertising — two calendar
weeks prior to requested publication date.

The implausibility of the Christmas story

This is how the birth of Jesus came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Matt. 1:18-21 (NIV)

Ponder for a moment how implausible such a concept must appear to the purely scientific mind.

Who could possibly believe a 1,000 year-old collection of 5,000 year-old verbal histories, the origins of which cannot be verified beyond a reasonable doubt, would foretell the coming of a Messiah and then ascribe the fulfillment of that prophecy to the obscure, apparently illegitimate birth of a Jewish commoner in a backwater Middle East town before there was even a decent calendar?

The biologist would explain that except for parthenogenesis in some lower plant and animal forms, no creature on earth ever came into existence without the sexual union of a male and a female of the same species.

The geneticist would ask, since every person must receive half his deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) from his mother and half from his father, where was the Holy Spirit's DNA?

The physician would posit that a child born in that era under such unsterile, primitive conditions probably didn't survive very long anyway.

The historian would assert the fact that no one is absolutely sure what time of year — or even the year itself — that Jesus was born.

The lawyer would demand that Mary

submit to a physical examination to disprove her incredible claim that she was pregnant and a virgin at the same time.

The atheist would argue that since there is no God, there can be no Son of God.

The sleep researcher would attest that since dreams are nothing more than the brain randomly misfiring during unconscious rest, Joseph's vision meant nothing.

The abortionist would say... well, we know what the abortionist would say.

No reasonable explanation can be found in science for the events surrounding Jesus' birth, so why should we believe the Bible account?

In a word — faith.

The righteousness of the gospel message is grounded in faith (Rom. 1:17). We derive our faith from accepting that message (Rom. 10:17), not by what we sense in our natural world (2 Cor. 5:8).

We must cover with faith everything we hold to be true (2 Ch. 20:20). We know that with faith, nothing is impossible (Matt. 17:20, Mark 11:22).

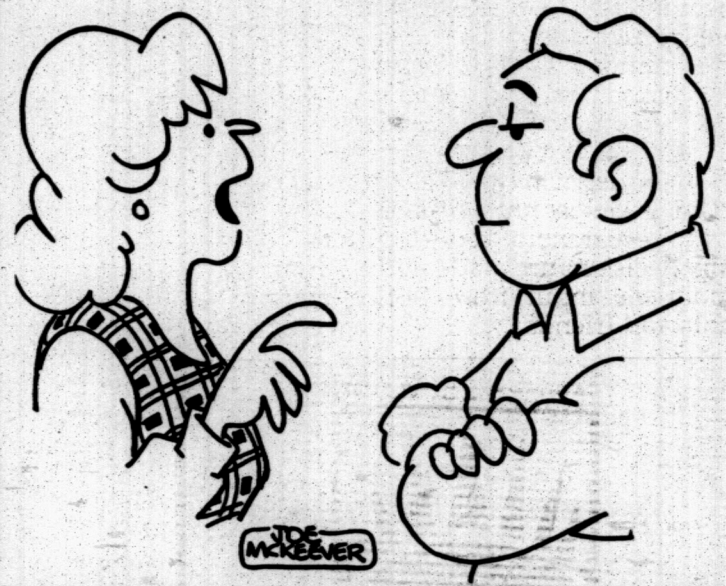
Faith is understanding that we cannot understand everything (Heb 11:3), and yet we must still be willing to turn control of our lives over to God (Psalm 97:10).

Faith is accepting with all your heart that God is who he says he is in his Word; that Jesus is the Son of God; that Jesus came into this world exactly as the Bible describes; and that Jesus is everything the Bible says he is.

There are people who live as if they believe every word of that statement. They call themselves Christians.

At this special time of year in the Christian world, be sure to make special time to share your faith with someone who doesn't know Jesus as the Christ. Show them by word and deed the true meaning of Christmas.

"I KNOW YOU BELIEVE
IN MISSIONS, SAMMY—
BUT I RESENT YOUR
LOTTIE-MOONIER-THAN-THOU
ATTITUDE!"



During this time of seemingly endless gift-giving, be sure your gifts really count for something.

Give your faith to those who really need it, and give your money to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions so every unsaved person on the globe can hear about Jesus before he comes again — and he is coming.

Our Lord has asked us to share both our faith and our resources with a lost world.

After what he did for us, it's the least we can do for him.

HELP!

**THEIR CRY
OUR CALL**

**Lottie Moon Christmas
Offering for
International Missions
Goal: \$100,000,000**

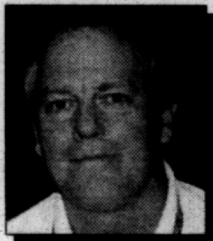
I have taken the original "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" letter and given it a little twist for this Christmas Season. It was amazing to me how I was able to keep most of the original wording and just substitute God for Santa:

I'm 16 years old. Some of my friends say there is no God. Papa says I'm old enough to make up my own mind. Please tell me the truth: Is there a God? Thank you, Virginia

Virginia, your friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism and cynicism of this secular age. They do not believe except they see, but they are blind because of their sin. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or women's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant. His intellect is indeed minute, especially compared with the all-knowing God. Man is incapable of grasping the whole truth on his own.

Yes, Virginia, there is a God. He exists as certainly as love, for God is love; generosity, for God has made all things for us; and devotion, as God loves us, cares for us, and desires that none should perish. You know that these things abound and can give your

GUEST OPINION:



*Yes, Virginia,
there is a God*

By Mike Fullilove
Long Beach



life purpose and peace. Alas! How dreary would the world be if there were no God. It would be as dreary as if there were no

Virginias. There would be no childlike faith, which it takes to accept and come to the Savior that God has provided for us. Without God there would be no hope to make this existence tolerable. We would have no joy, except it be in the Lord. God is the eternal light which fills the world, extinguishing man's darkness.

Not believe in God! You might as well not believe in miracles! Your papa might hire men to watch the evening sky for God, but seeing nothing is not a sign that there is no God. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. God works in both the visible and invisible realms, and in the hearts of men and women.

No God? He Is! He lives! and his Son, Jesus, also lives and will reign forever. A thousand years from now, ten thousand years from now, those who know the Lord and have accepted him as Lord and Savior in childlike faith will live with him eternally. Indeed, he will make your heart glad.

This Christmas take heart Virginia, celebrate the greatest gift ever given. Celebrate the birth of God's Son. God gave us the gift of his Son Jesus to be our Savior and our Lord! Hallelujah!

Fullilove is a former member of First Church, Long Beach, and a small businessman.

Gallup Poll: parents strong influence on teens

PRINCETON, N.J. (ABP) — Parents have more influence on their teens than they might think, according to a new Gallup Poll.

"Teenagers are looking to their parents for help in decisions that might affect their future and to friends for issues of the moment," Gallup's Princeton Religion Research Center reported.

The center's Gallup Youth Survey asked American teens to report the amount of influence they attribute to parents and peers in the decisions they make.

"The issue is not cut-and-dried," researchers reported. "Many decisions are made with considerable input from both parents and friends."

Parents exert the most influence regarding long-term decisions, while friends win the day in the short term, they said.

Gallup researchers divided their findings on who influences teen behaviors into three categories:

◆ Strong parental influence.

The decisions most heavily influenced by parents are those that affect the teen's future and what kind of person he or she eventually will be," the researchers discovered.

For example, the highest degree of parental influence, 77%, shapes whether teens go to college, the survey found. That compares to just a 5% margin of influence for friends.

Seventy percent of teens said

their parents provide the greatest influence regarding whether or not they should attend religious services. Only 9% said their friends primarily help shape that decision.

Parents are more influential than friends in ensuring that teens do their homework, with a 66%/15% division

between parental and peer influence.

Parents also provide the greatest input in whether or not to drink (50%) and whether or not to have sex (48%).

◆ Similar influence between parents and peers.

Both groups are influential in helping teens determine whether or not to smoke, with parents strongest for 47% of teens and peers strongest for 26%.

Similar influences shape whether or not teens date, with parents still holding the edge, 45% to 29%.

The influence is more evenly divided concerning what teens choose to read. Parents' influence matters most for 36 % of teens, while peers influence 23% the most.

◆ Strong peer influence.

Half of teens said their friends provide more influence than their parents regarding whether they should cut classes from school, with parents influential for only one-third of teens.

Friends out-influence parents when teens determine whom to date, 44% to 25%, and concerning the way they wear their hair, 47% to 19%.

Peer pressure is strongest when teens choose clothes, with 59% saying their friends influence them the most, compared

to just 16% who wear what mom and dad think they should wear.

The Gallup survey also showed parental influence decreases in the later teens.

"The number of teens who report that parents have more influence than do their friends over decisions about attending religious services, drinking, having sex, smoking, dating, choice of books, hairstyle, and whom to date decreases as they grow older," researchers reported.

The poll also indicated girls respect their parents' influence more than boys in matters of having sex, whether to date, and whom to date.



THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

THE BAPTIST Record

PUBLISHED SINCE 1877

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VOL. 121

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Miss. pro-life emphasis to kick off Jan. 1

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

The Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission (CAC) is encouraging Baptists across the state to participate in "Twenty-Five is Enough," a nationwide 25-day observance of the 25th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* decisions that legalized abortion in America.

"Mississippi Governor Kirk Fordice has proclaimed January 1998 as 'Month of Prayer to End Abortion' in the state of Mississippi, and he will formally announce the proclamation Jan. 5 at 1 p.m. on the south steps of the New Capitol," said Paul G. Jones, CAC executive director.

The campaign has also been endorsed by the leaders in the state's other major religious denominations, all statewide elected officials, both U.S. senators from Mississippi, and four of five U.S. congressmen representing the state, Jones reported.

The observance coincides with Sanctity of Human Life Sunday on Jan. 18 in churches across the Southern Baptist Convention.

"CAC is calling upon the churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention to support and participate in the prayer vigil and awareness campaign marking the twenty-five years since the legalization of abortion in our nation. The cam-

paign, endorsed through a resolution by messengers to the 1997 Mississippi Baptist Convention, is a call to responsible Christian action and plea to remember the over 35 million babies who have lost their lives," he said.

Jones recommended that Mississippi Baptist churches and individual Mississippi Baptists:

◆ establish a prayer vigil Jan. 1-25, committed to daily prayer that legislative and judicial leaders will affirm the sanctity of human life.

◆ pray continually during a single 25-hour period to end abortion in America.

◆ attend and support local observances.

◆ attend and support the statewide candlelight prayer vigil that begins at 5 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 17, on the south steps of the New Capitol Building in Jackson.

◆ encourage in their local churches the use of Sanctity of Human Life lessons and materials in Sunday School on Jan. 18.

◆ discuss in Discipleship Training and other study groups the meaning and purpose of human life.

◆ encourage pastors to preach on the sanctity of human life during the proclaimed "Month of Prayer to End Abortion," especially on Jan. 18 for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday.

For more information on

"Twenty-Five is Enough," the "Month of Prayer to End Abortion" in Mississippi, and other pro-life activities around the state, contact CAC at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 968-3800 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651.

To secure materials for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday for distribution to churches and associations, contact the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission at 901 Commerce Street #750, Nashville, TN 37203-3696. Telephone: (615) 244-2495.

Foundation board meets

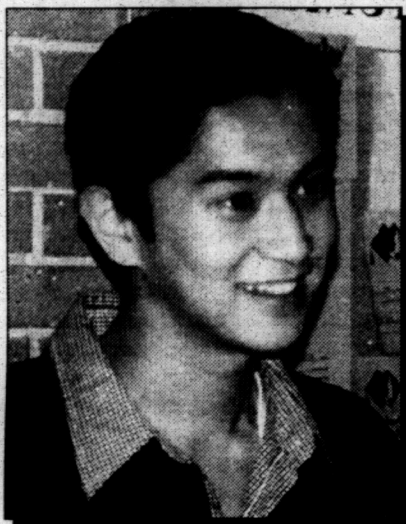


Members of the Mississippi Baptist Foundation board of trustees attending a meeting Dec. 4 at the Baptist Building in Jackson included (back row, from left) Robert Maddux, Paul Breazeale, Joe Gary, Barry Hardy, Kearney Travis, (front row, from left) Bob Ross-treasurer, E.E. Laird Jr.-president, Chid Lofton-vice president, and Ron Logan-secretary. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

Lottie bearing fruit through Miss. student

By Carl M. White
Associate Editor

Most Mississippians who give to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions (LMCO) don't anticipate seeing the fruit of their gift — a foreigner who has been saved.



Fujii

However, at the Baptist Student Union (BSU) on the campus of the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) there is living proof of the effectiveness of LMCO in the form of a smiling freshman from Fukuoka, Japan.

Yoshi Fujii is a 20-year-old Spanish major.

He has been at USM since March 1996, when he entered the English Language Institute (ELI) for a five month course in the English language.

Though Yoshi's family is Buddhist, he attended Seinan Gakuin High School, a Christian school founded by Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) missionary C. K. Dozier and supported through LMCO.

As a result, Yoshi got to know David and Robin Johnson, SBC missionaries to Japan, and a journeyman from Hattiesburg named Casey Sullivan, a graduate of Baptist-affiliated William Carey College in Hattiesburg.

Robin Johnson, also a Mississippian, is from Columbus.

As part of a high school class assignment, Yoshi had to attend services at a Christian church and write about what happened. So he went to the Baptist church that is part of the high school.

That was the beginning of a journey that led to his accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

"I wanted to learn English and Casey would help me," he said.

In addition, attending church services opened up the Bible to Yoshi. He wanted to learn more, so he talked with the missionaries.

"They told me to trust the Lord with all my heart," Yoshi said. "I thought this was a good way to think about life."

During this time Yoshi was having a lot of personal problems.

"I had problems with school and with my family as a teen," even to the point of being severely depressed, he recalled.

"It was my Christian friends who helped me. They saved my life, really!" he said.

Through the witness of the Johnsons, whom he calls his American parents in Japan, Yoshi made a profession of faith in Christ and was baptized in November 1995.

"I started to learn about the Bible and how to live as a Christian," he said.

"After I started to think (like a Christian) everything started to work out. I realized I can get over any problem with him (the Lord)."

His long-held dream was to come to America.

Yoshi had tried earlier to talk his father into letting him come to America as a high school exchange student, but his

father would not hear of it.

After his conversion, Yoshi still dreamed of coming to America. Through Sullivan's family in Hattiesburg, Yoshi was able to make contact with the (ELI) at USM. Foreign students from the world over come to ELI to learn English before enrolling in American colleges and universities.

"I begged my father to give me just one year," he said. This time, Christian friends were praying for Yoshi, and his father gave in.

"The Lord was paving the way," Yoshi said.

After five months at ELI, Yoshi passed the English proficiency test which meant he was ready to attend an American college or university. He also scored high on his college entrance exams.

By now he had gotten involved at the BSU and begun to learn more about Baptists and Christians in America.

"I was serious when I was baptized," Yoshi said. "I thought I knew a lot about Christianity, but after I got here I found out how little I knew and how much American Christians know."

"Before, I never thought about using alcohol or smoking as being wrong."

Yoshi and his friends began praying that his father would allow him to stay in Hattiesburg to attend USM.

"I had a long talk with my father on the phone," Yoshi said. "I worked hard for the ELI test and for the ACT. Most of my friends at ELI could not get a good enough grade the first time, but I could," he said. "I wanted to show my father that I could do the work."

Once again his prayers were answered and he was allowed to stay in Hattiesburg and pursue a Spanish major.

"Now I live very far from my family, but through the BSU I have been able to meet godly, faithful friends," he said.

Yoshi is very active in BSU. He has even gone on a mission trip to Guatemala, and he plans to go on another mission trip to Canada this spring. He is very aware of his unique testimony for Christ and wants to be a positive witness.

"I met two other Japanese students here. I have to show them what I believe, and I think I can witness to them," he said.

As a member of First Church, Hattiesburg, Yoshi has been given the opportunity to give to the Lottie Moon offering.

That means the offering has come full circle, at least in one Japanese student's life. He is a living example of the effectiveness of this offering for missions — human lives changed by Christ that in turn reach out and change other human lives.

HELP!

THEIR CRY OUR CALL

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Missions
Goal: \$100,000,000

MBHC sets Feb. church anniversary workshop

The Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission (MBHC) will conduct an anniversary workshop Feb. 20 on Mississippi College's Clinton campus to assist churches planning celebrations of significant anniversaries during 1998-2000.

"Our last workshop was very popular, with attendees receiving hints about the value of celebrating a significant anniversary (100, 125, 150, 175, and 200 years); the options of scheduling a basic, intermediate, or comprehensive anniversary; and the methodology of planning an anniversary," said Edward L. McMillan, MBHC executive secretary.

The workshop will run from 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., and will feature a popular section entitled, "The Nuts and Bolts of Writing a Church History." Registrants will also:

- view the comprehensive resources available at the Mississippi College Library for research and writing church histories.

- hear representatives of First Church, Canton, which recently planned and celebrated a significant anniversary.

- talk with the anniversary committee of First Church, Kosciusko, which is putting together the church's 1998 sesquicentennial celebration.

Although the workshop is specifically designed for churches celebrating signifi-

cant anniversaries, all churches are invited.

McMillan reported a total of 34 Mississippi Baptist churches representing 4,425 years of combined service have celebrated significant anniversaries in 1997, with an MBHC representative in attendance to present a letter of commendation and a certificate of appreciation.

Records indicate 52 Mississippi Baptist churches have significant anniversaries in

1998, as well as 38 churches in 1999.

"These anniversary celebrations provide an ideal opportunity for Mississippi Baptist churches to review a rich heritage, observe unbelievable blessings, and commit anew to a promising future," McMillan said.

For more information on the workshop, contact the MBHC Librarian, P.O. Box 51, Clinton, MS 39060-0051. Telephone: (601) 925-3434.

1997 Mississippi Baptist church anniversaries

(by church, association)

150 years

Bethel, Winston
Bethlehem, Scott
Enterprise, Clarke
Mt. Moriah, Choctaw
Mt. Pisgah, Carroll
Mt. Vernon, Mississippi
New Zion, Copiah
Philadelphia, Lafayette
Pinckney, Newton
Pleasant Hill, Benton/Tippah
Pleasant Hill, Union County
Providence, Lawrence
Walnut Grove, Leake
Yockanookany, Attala

125 years

Ashland, Benton/Tippah
First-Sand Hill, Greene
First-State Line, Wayne
Holly Springs, Marion
Lincoln Association
Mt. Moriah, Benton/Tippah
Mt. Olive, Chickasaw
Pleasant Grove, Lincoln
Pope, Panola
Port Gibson, Union
Springfield, Scott
Thaxton, Pontotoc
Whitesand, Jeff Davis

100 years

Amity, Chickasaw
Bethlehem, Alcorn
Clear Branch, Rankin
Ethel, Attala
First-Brooklyn, Lebanon
Montevista, Webster
Perkinston, Gulf Coast

Source: Mississippi Baptist
Historical Commission

Ala. smear campaign has Miss. connection

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP — Anti-gambling leaders say a recent smear campaign against an Alabama moral concerns leader provides a textbook example of how far gamblers will go to expand their interests.

Dan Ireland, former president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and executive director of the Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP), said anonymous letters linking him to a casino were an attempt to defame him.

"The effort was geared to discredit my credibility and ALCAP's," Ireland said of phony letters alleging contributions to the organization from a Mississippi casino company. The donations were supposedly to thwart competition from springing up in Alabama.

"If the intent was to divide our ranks, it boomeranged," Ireland said. "It opened the public's eyes to the kind of people they're dealing with. I think (the opposition) thought they could bring enough pressure on me to step aside."

Paul Jones, executive director of the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, said Ireland's long record of integrity and effectiveness made him a natural target for gamblers.

"This isn't an issue of Dan, it's an issue of proponents of gambling who are willing to pervert the truth and go to any means to achieve their ends," said Jones, a leading critic of the gambling industry.

One reason, observed Tom Grey, executive director of the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling (NCALG), is gambling's lack of grassroots support.

"It's driven from the top down," said Grey, a United Methodist minister who lives near Chicago. "They don't have any popular support. George doesn't say to Ethel over morning coffee, 'You know, what Alabama needs is off-track betting.'"

It's their dollars and muscle against our

people. The question is who will speak for the people if the politicians and lobbyists are brokering to use gambling against communities."

The case in Alabama made headlines when a pair of letters, supposedly written to Ireland on Casino Magic stationery, were circulated in September to state legislators. In October the same, unsigned letters appeared in the mailboxes of more than 3,000 Alabama Baptist pastors.

However, an investigation by The Alabama Baptist newsjournal brought denials from Casino Magic officials of any ties to the letters. The report also revealed that the firm has an interest in a 92-acre site in Mobile, in case gambling is legalized in the state.

The newspaper also pointed out various inconsistencies in the unsigned letters and a cover sheet that went to pastors. Mailed from two different cities, the packets carried no return address.

Ireland said he first became aware of the matter when an Associated Press reporter called this summer to ask for a reaction.

Although the reporter admitted the letters had been given to him by a gambling lobbyist, he refused to show them to the ALCAP leader, saying they had been given to him in confidence. Consequently, Ireland said he couldn't comment since he had never seen them.

The first mailing generated negative reaction from legislators, many offering assistance to combat the smear attempt. One told Ireland, "Dan, you of all people should not be attacked like this. You can disagree on issues without having a vicious and slanderous attack."

If anything, the phony letters made ALCAP's position stronger, said Ireland, who holds a master's degree from New Orleans Seminary and a doctor of divinity from Samford University in Birmingham.

However, he admitted it can be frustrating trying to combat rumors.

"You can't even pin it down," he said. "I've been here 20 years and this is the most vicious thing I've ever been through. These are the only charges brought against me as a person involving my ethics or morality."

This incident demonstrates the need for anti-gambling forces everywhere to maintain their integrity, Ireland said. That includes not accepting any funds from gamblers or mysterious front organizations that may have links to casinos, he said.

Although ALCAP is an independent organization, it receives most of its funding from the Alabama Baptist State Convention and member churches, as well as several other denominations. It receives about 15% of its annual budget from the Cooperative Program, he said.

"If you're going to fight an issue, you're putting a question mark on your own credibility," Ireland said of accepting questionable donations. "If you're going to fight gambling, you don't need to be taking money or other support from gamblers."

Jones said the Alabama case poses a warning to the church to not engage in similar tactics.

"Christians are very good, anytime there's an issue we oppose, with rising up and not calling it blessed, but sometimes we go after the person instead of the issue," he pointed out.



Gambling tide may be turning, but battles remain

HANOVER, Ill. (BP) — After five years of battling legalized gambling, Tom Grey said the tide is turning against the pastime that once was predicted to be the "wave of the future."

"When I started in 1992, gambling was called a great force of history," said the executive

director of the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling (NCALG), which was founded in 1994. "It's a major victory when they aren't expanding anymore."

However, anti-gambling forces cannot relax their efforts, said Grey, who hopes to see the

legalization of gambling rolled back in certain states.

At present, only a few states have no form of legalized gambling. Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia have lotteries, while more than two dozen have casinos.

Fighting the influence of gambling, which claimed \$586 billion in wagers last year, will only happen with the leadership, commitment, and power of Christians, said the NCALG director.

The church's resources and vision are necessary to convince people to fight, Grey said. He said it requires a very intentional, educational campaign to inform the public about gambling's dangers.

According to the Maryland-based organization, studies show that for every dollar gambling produces for a regional economy, three dollars are lost because of economic and social costs. The NCALG said it also damages local businesses, because every \$100 spent in a slot machine is \$100 that won't be spent in restaurants, theaters or stores.

Paul Jones, executive director of Mississippi Baptists' Christian Action Commission, cautioned those who oppose

gambling can't adopt every tactic of the opposition. Whether time or money, anti-gambling forces must use their resources wisely, he said.

"Our challenge is to capture the hearts and minds of people," he said.

"The church doesn't function as the competition does, thank God. When we spend all our time lobbying, we get away from our purpose and lose our strength," Jones stressed.



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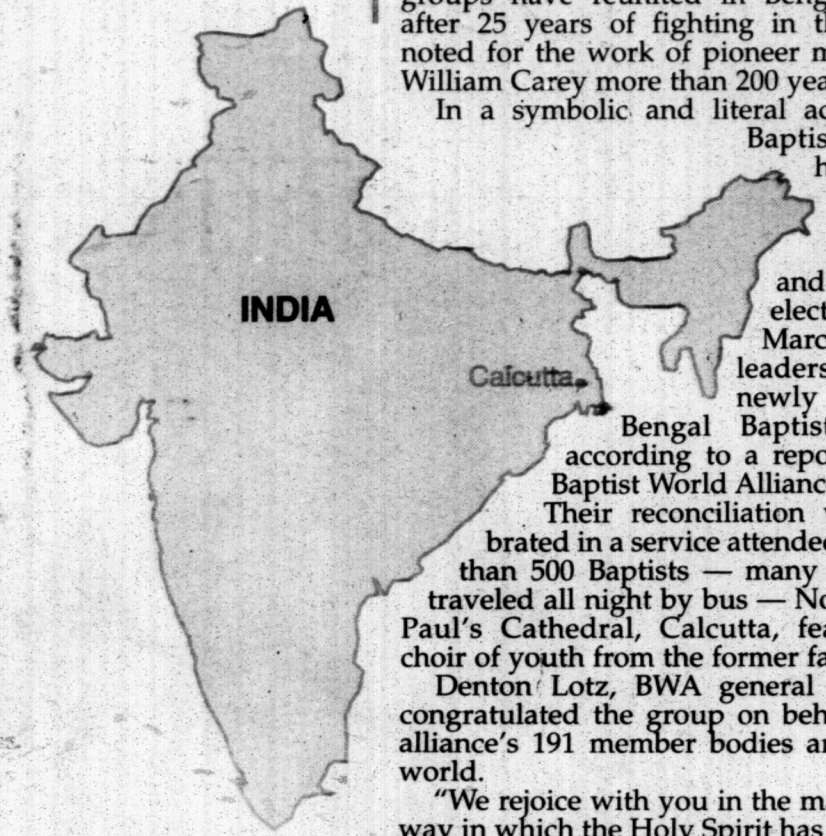
The Baptist Record will not publish on Christmas Day, Thursday, Dec. 25. The next issue of the newspaper will be dated Thursday, Jan. 1. Due to the New Year's Day federal holiday, postal delivery of the Jan. 1 issue will be delayed.

Because of holiday schedules, deadline for news articles to appear in the Jan. 1 and Jan. 8 issues is Thursday, Dec. 18. Deadline for advertisements to appear in the Jan. 1 and Jan. 8 issues has passed.

For churches that publish special pages, any information that must appear before the Jan. 1 issue should be included in the Dec. 18 issue. Church special pages for the Jan. 1 issue must arrive at Cain Lithographers no later than 12 noon on Tuesday, Dec. 30.

For more information, contact The Baptist Record at (601) 968-3800 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651. Church special page users should directly contact Cain Lithographers at (601) 981-4700.

Baptists unite in region where Carey worked



WASHINGTON (BP) — Three Baptist groups have reunited in Bengal, India, after 25 years of fighting in the region noted for the work of pioneer missionary William Carey more than 200 years ago.

In a symbolic and literal act, Bengal Baptist leaders have submitted their resignations and agreed to elections next March for new leaders for the newly formed Bengal Baptist Union, according to a report by the Baptist World Alliance.

Their reconciliation was celebrated in a service attended by more than 500 Baptists — many of whom traveled all night by bus — Nov. 8 at St. Paul's Cathedral, Calcutta, featuring a choir of youth from the former factions.

Denton Lotz, BWA general secretary, congratulated the group on behalf of the alliance's 191 member bodies around the world.

"We rejoice with you in the magnificent way in which the Holy Spirit has moved to bring it together," Lotz said.

He said the Baptist family is praying that the unity of Bengal Baptists "will be an impetus to further evangelize your great city and country."

Lotz had urged reconciliation among the divided Baptists in remarks four years ago during 200th anniversary celebrations in Calcutta of the arrival of Carey to Bengal.

The clashes in Bengal, ironically, were not theological, but over property which led to court cases before secular judges and leadership conflicts which seemed insurmountable between two Bengal Baptist

unions started by Carey and affiliated to the British Missionary Society, and an offshoot independent group from both of these, the Bengal Baptist Fellowship.

After 10 meetings of an "Ad-Hoc Reconciliation Committee" formed after the Carey celebrations and countless other meetings with the individual groups, the final process for reconciliation began a year ago in Calcutta.

Committee chairman J.H. Mohanty said at the time, "Unless we come together, we are not fit to work."

Graham recovering after hospital stay

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)—Evangelist Billy Graham was discharged from St. Luke's Hospital, Jacksonville, Fla., Dec. 9 after a week-long stay for pneumonia.

"We have been very encouraged by Dr. Graham's quick recovery," said Charles Burger, Graham's attending physician at the hospi-



Graham

tal, which he affiliated with the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minn.

Graham, 73, will continue a course of antibiotics, Burger said, and we have suggested that he rest for the next few weeks to make sure his infection completely resolves.

Graham began experiencing fever, chills, and discolored sputum about a week before entering the hospital Dec. 3. He had been on vacation in the Caribbean. He will spend the Christmas holidays at his North Carolina home.



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New Orleans Seminary will host the annual Church Music Symposium on Jan. 12-15. Guest clinicians will be Simon Carrington, founder of the renowned British vocal ensemble, The King's Singers; Randall Bradley, coordinator of the Church Music Department at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Okla.; and Gerald Ray, music minister at First Church, Houston. Cost will be \$90. For additional information, contact the Division of Church Music Ministries, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 3939 Gentilly Blvd., New Orleans, LA 70126-4858; or call (504) 282-4455.

Bayou View Church,

First Church, Vancleave, held its 95th Homecoming Celebration Sunday on Sept. 28. Recognized for being at the church longer than any other present member were Lula Moore, (left) and Hazel Vaughn (right). Ministers present were (from left) Jimmy Henry, minister of students (1996-present); Patrick Mobley, minister of music (1983-1988), presently in Pensacola, Fla.; Randy C. Davis, pastor (1979-1992), presently in Morristown, Tenn.; Greg Potts, pastor (1993-present); and Gordon Alford, minister of music (1988-present).

Gulfport, will observe the Lord's Supper during a candlelight service on Christmas Eve at 6 p.m.

"The Night Christ Was Born" will be presented at **Branch Church, Morton,** Dec. 20 at 7 p.m. and Dec. 21 at 6 p.m. Norman Huggins is director. James E. Watts is pastor. For more information, call (601) 732-2918 or 732-8503.

Calvary Church, Anchorage, Alaska, will celebrate its 50th anniversary Feb. 13-15. Former members are requested to contact Denise Rose at 3200 Shamrock St., Anchorage, Alaska 99504, or call (907) 338-7738. E-mail: Ore@Alaska.net.



Macedonia Church GAs

Macedonia Church, Petal, recently held a Recognition Service for its GAs and Acteens. GAs pictured (front row) are Laken Holt, Chellie McWilliams, Jessica Stewart; (middle row) Amanda Lee, Whitney Richards, Sara Daughdrill, Erin Dueitt, Corey Odom and Holly Seal; (back row) Brenda McWilliams, leader, and Paula Pritchard, director. Acteens are (from left) Melinda McGregor, director; Holly McGregor, Queen with Scepter; Amy Hicks, Queen; Amanda Meadows, Queen with Scepter. Not pictured is Ashley Smith, Queen with



Macedonia Church Acteens



Children's Mission in Action of First Church, Waynesboro, collected monies from different classes and organizations of the church to purchase a cow for Jeff Palmer, missionary to the

Philippines, as a Mission Action Project. The children also sent a check for \$100 for this project. Pictured (from left) are Scott Strickland, Sheri Blackledge, Victoria Waites, Erica Sumrall, Dustin Freeman, Derek Roberts, Cade Clanton. Not pictured are Lynnsey Dearman and Jared Strickland.

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God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)

Acknowledge Christ as Lord.
If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. (Rom. 10:9)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Mississippi Baptist Church for spiritual guidance.

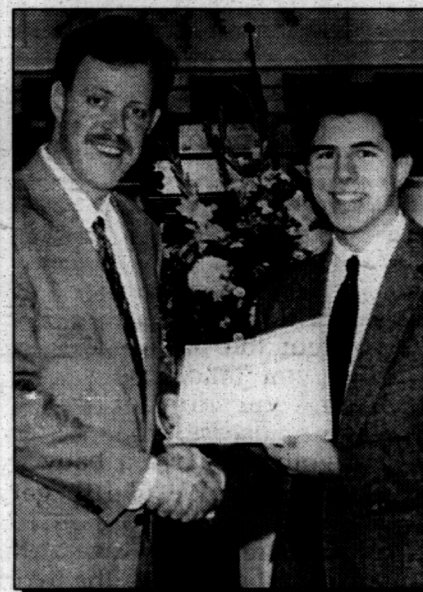
NAMES IN THE NEWS



Jimmy Welch was recently honored by Oak Hill Church, Pontotoc, with a special service and reception for 50 years in the ministry. The deacons of Oak Hill Church presented him with a gold watch inscribed with the name of the church. The 11 a.m. message was delivered by his son Jerry Welch. His granddaughter Lauren honored him with a special song. Pictured (from left) are Bill Russell, former chairman of deacons; Irvin Frankhouser, chairman, Welch, and George Stewart, director of missions.



Victor Walsh (right), a McComb dentist, was licensed to the ministry by Bluff Springs Church, Magnolia, Nov. 16. Walsh is serving as interim pastor of Bluff Springs Church.



Hilda Causey Morgan has been faithful in reading her Bible every day for 50 years. Bethel Church, Mississippi Association, honored her with a special recognition and certificate presented by James Sadler, pastor, on Sept. 21. Morgan, who was born March 27, 1926, joined Berwick Church in Sept. 1947 and began her commitment to daily Bible reading. On Nov. 4, 1950, she married Robert Lee Morgan and the next day moved her letter to Bethel Church.

James Busby is available for supply and interim work. He can be contacted at 5293 Hwy 80, Vicksburg, MS 39180, or call (601) 636-5153.

BAPTIST COLLEGE NEWS

William Carey College Speech and Debate Team (Forensics) placed first overall at the Louisiana Lagniappe Tournament at Louisiana State University, Shreveport. The Crusader team placed 107.5 points ahead of the second placed school, Arkansas State University.

William Carey College student, **Jon Celoria** of Smithdale, was awarded the prestigious Rotary Ambassadorial Fellowship, according to the Rotary Foundation of Rotary International. Celoria, a senior history major, received the scholarship which will allow him to attend any school in the world all expenses paid for one year.



Celoria

Mike Rice, a graduate of William Carey College and a teacher at Stringer Attendance Center (SAC), was named the 1997 Nortel Rural Telecommunications Teacher of the Year. Rice created a series of after school programs teaching aviation science and math, using the Internet and computer flight simulation. His innovative education efforts, open to all students in grades 4 through 12, led to a special place in history when his students became the first class to be linked to the space shuttle via the Internet.

Mississippi College will begin registration for the 1998 spring semester on Jan. 12 in the B.C. Rogers Student Center. For

registration information call the Office of Undergraduate Admissions at (601) 925-3240; Office of Graduate Studies, 925-3225; or Office of the Registrar, 925-3210.

William Carey College students recently received the Dorothea Van Deusen Opdyke Scholarship. **Amanda Hughes**, of Louisville, Ky., and **Amy Pounds**, of McGehee, Ark., were awarded the scholarships which are funded by a bequest left to the Southern Baptist Convention by Ida Reed Opdyke of Jamestown, N. Y., as a memorial to her daughter. "The scholarship is to be used for the education of needy mountain people," said Opdyke. Hughes, a church music major, is an active member of the Baptist Student Union (BSU) and Chorale. She was awarded a Studio Award for Voice. Pounds, an elementary education major, is an active member of the BSU.

Bart Latner III was recently licensed by Greg Warnock, pastor of First Church, Brookhaven. Latner is a student at Mississippi College in Biblical studies.

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FAMILY BIBLE SERIES

Celebrating in Joy

Matthew 1:20-21; I John 4:7-17

By Debbie Sills

Only four more shopping days left! At least that is how our world views December 21. It seems Christmas begins earlier each year. Stores begin putting out red and green decorations as early as October and the mad rush to get that perfect present at the best bargain price consumes most shopper's attention for months. How often do we really consider what the season is all about? How often do we consider why we give and receive presents and gather with our family members? Hopefully, the meaning behind our actions and traditions goes beyond mere expectations. Our actions

during this season, and throughout the year for that matter, should reflect our enjoyment of the love God revealed to us through the birth of his Son.

Love Explains (Matt 1:20-21). Have you ever thought how different this passage would be if Joseph had been unwilling to accept the angel's explanation of Mary's pregnancy? What would be your reaction if your wife-to-be or daughter were in this situation? Joseph's reaction is incredible. It is important to note here that God knew what type of person Joseph was. He knew his faith and he entrusted his Son to this loving, nurturing family.



Sills

Joseph was a man of integrity and took his responsibility to Mary seriously. Much more than this however, he took his love for his God seriously. He was obedient to God and loved him enough to follow God's direction.

These verses remind us of God's love for mankind. He became human to lead us out of the darkness of sin. He also reminds us of the importance of family. Families take on many shapes and forms, but the underlying message is the same — God places importance on the responsibility of families. It is interesting to note that God chose to place his Son in a family that was just beginning instead of one that had already been established. Perhaps one reason for this was because he wanted them to experience all things together as a family.

God gives each of us special people in our lives. Sometimes our family members are the last ones to which we show appreciation and love. Christmas is about God's love for his children. He chose to reveal his love for man within the boundaries of a family.

Love Exhibits (I John 4:7-10). The theme we have been studying in this unit is God's love. John continues this theme by explaining further how God has exhibited his love for man. God sent his Son to be born on earth, grow up to be a young man, and die a horrible death on a cross. John brings out a very important point in verse 10. Humans did not love God; God loved us. Christ's birth was God's initiation, not a response to man's love for him. God made the first step and provided the sacrifice to satisfy the demands of sin. He loves us regardless of how much, or little we love him.

Love Expands (I John 4:11-17). Just knowing that God loves us should cause a tremendous bubbling in our heart. Do you remember your first love? Wasn't it exciting and joyful to learn someone loved you? Are you experiencing the excitement and joy of God's love? His divine love is greater than any other love we will ever experience. Many around us have never experienced God's love. They have never known the true joy of being loved. Showing love to those around us is what God asks of us. His love is too magnificent to be kept a secret.

During this wonderful season remember why God chose to send his Son. He loves us more than our human brains can conceive and he wants us to show that love to others through our words and through our actions.

Sills is advertising coordinator for The Baptist Record.

LIFE AND WORK

God's Missionary Message

Luke 2:8-12, 16-18, 25-32

By Don Lum

The study theme for this month is "Change The World." It is a challenge we need to always keep before us. Do you really believe your life can make a difference in this world? God said it could.

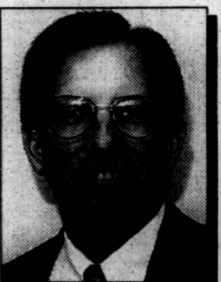
Last week's scripture quotes Jesus as saying, "You are the light of the world." Light does change things. It makes a remarkable difference in the darkness. We have seen what God wants to do through us. This week we take a closer look at the wonderful message we have to share.

A Message About Jesus (2:8-12). Good news! Everybody likes it, everybody

wants to hear it . . . you got the promotion, you made the team, you do not have a disease, you are going to have a baby . . . Good news! We like to get it and we can't wait to share it.

Luke retells an event that was the best news the world ever received! The best part is this good news is for everyone; all people for all time. The news is that a Savior is born! God came to earth! He was born for us! He is Lord!

Nothing will ever change the news, but the news affects each person according to the way he/she receives it and responds to it. He came as the Savior to the world, but he is received as



Lum

Savior by one individual heart at a time.

There were shepherds in the fields. A normal night was split apart by the glory of the Lord!

They were living their lives, doing their job and God came with a message. The message was about Jesus. It was wonderful fresh news about a baby who was born to "save" us.

There is something about familiarity that destroys motivation. Don't let the Christmas story be so familiar that it loses its excitement and motivation for you. Jesus is Lord and Savior. We all need him to live in this world everyday. Christ the Lord is living in me and directing me, step by step, moment by moment. Imagine yourself in the fields with the shepherds. Listen to the angel. Focus on the message.

A Message to be Shared (2:16-18). How did the message

affect the shepherds? How did they respond? They did two things. They hurried off to see the sign (v. 12) and when they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about Jesus.

We are compelled to do the same. While there is no baby in a manger for us to hurry off and see, we can still see him in our mind. He is a crucified and risen Lord.

We need to see him. We need to daily see him and remember what he did for us and let it change our focus.

C. S. Lewis wrote that all of human history comes down to this one little point, as tiny as the tip of a Roman spear: a baby born to a teenage girl in an obscure part of the world.

When we really see him, we too will want to share. We have the cure for the disease of the world and it is ours to give away.

A Message For All People

(2:25-32). This last section is a wonderful reminder of God's faithfulness and personal connection with each one of his children.

Simeon was a righteous and devout man. He followed God and the Holy Spirit was upon him. God had revealed to him that he would see the Christ and he did.

God cares for each one of us and is so faithful to work in our lives. When Simeon saw Jesus he knew who he was. He quoted Isaiah in praising God. Jesus would be a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of Israel, Jews, and non-Jews. Salvation for everyone, freely offered, is ours to receive, experience, enjoy, and share. Jesus said he came to give abundant life. Part of that will only be experienced as we know the joy of leading someone to him. Don't miss it! You have good news to share. Share it!

Lum is a consultant in the Miss. Baptist Evangelism Dept.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Worshipping the Savior

Matthew 1:18-2:33

By Edna Martin Ellison

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, and worship is the best way to celebrate his birth. This week we focus on three wise men, the Magi, who came to worship Jesus.

Sincere Desire to Worship the Savior (2:1-12). After Jesus was born (some say up to two years afterward), Magi came to Jerusalem searching for the Christ child. Since they came from east of Jerusalem, they were likely to be Gentiles, not Jews. The Magi show that the gospel is for all. Imagine the dedication to travel many miles following a bright star! Isaiah 60:3 predicts "Nations will

come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn." They proclaimed the Christ who had been "born king of the Jews" (v. 2). They went to King Herod and asked directions to the child. They were determined to worship him!

Herod's family were natives of Idumaea, south of Jerusalem, and had been in power in Judea for years. His father, appointed procurator by Julius Caesar in B.C. 47, made Herod and his brother rulers over various areas of the country. Finally Anthony and Octavian received Herod in Rome and proclaimed him king of Judea. However,



Ellison

later the Parthians overran Jerusalem and Herod fled. After gaining Roman support, he reclaimed the city.

Pretended Desire to Worship the Savior (2:3-8). Fearing an invasion from Parthian forces, Herod was disturbed when the Magi asked about a new king. He had taken Jerusalem by force and he was not about to give it up. He called in his advisors (v. 4), to find out where the birth would happen. They told him the prediction of Bethlehem in Micah 5:2. "But out of you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel" (v. 6).

Sometimes fear causes us to do things in secret. Herod, upset and fearful, called the Magi secretly to find out exactly when the star had appeared. He asked them to

report to him so he could worship the Christ child.

Fulfilled Desire to Worship the Savior (2:9-11). Herod's deception contrasted with the genuineness of the Magi, who sincerely wanted to worship the Savior. They continued to follow the star, which miraculously led them to Jesus (v. 9). The Spirit still works miracles in our lives, which we cannot take for granted. We look for miraculous elements in our lives as God supernaturally leads us closer to the Savior. Notice their reaction when they saw the star: "They were overjoyed" (v. 10), just as we are when we perceive a miracle. Imagine their joy when they saw Jesus! They found him at his house, not in a manger (v. 11). When they saw the child, they reacted in several ways — first, they bowed before him, showing his almighty power before their

humble existence — even though they were kings! Second, they worshiped him, showing his lordship. Third, they gave expensive gifts, setting an example of stewardship. Gold perhaps paid for the family's escape to Egypt later (after Herod threatened to kill Jesus). Myrrh perhaps met the family's health needs, since it was a pain-reliever. Incense fulfilled the family's spiritual need. In Exodus 30:9 God approved incense for traditional worship services. This gift enabled Mary and Joseph to worship in style!

The Magi's worship encourages us to worship as we celebrate Christ's birth. It also encourages us to give our time, our service, and our money for missions or benevolence. What will you give him this Christmas?

Ellison is a consultant in the Miss. Woman's Missionary Union.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Struggling toward maturity

Gen. 32:22-32

By Edna Martin Ellison

This week we continue our story of the struggle in Jacob's life as he moves from selfishness to servanthood. Perhaps the biggest obstacle Jacob had to overcome was his own personality. After he left home following his brother Esau's threat to kill him, he moved to Haran, where his mother's family had lived. As usual, Jacob remained in trouble constantly. He fell in love with a younger sister, had to marry her older sister, finally gaining the younger wife he sought. As a husband, he dealt with jealousy and infertility with his usual lack of judg-

ment. As a businessman, he caused trouble between his men and his father-in-law Laban's men over use of the livestock. Finally he ran away from Haran, urging his wives to steal household gods as they left. Laban quickly pursued him. At last — at Laban's suggestion — they made a covenant between them, building monuments to peace (Gen. 31:44). After Laban had kissed his grandchildren and blessed them, Jacob continued on his journey. The years in Haran had been marked by economic conflict and family problems, but not by any notable



Ellison

spiritual progress in Jacob's life.

A Lonely Ordeal (Gen. 32:22-25). As Jacob moved his livestock to graze in Edom, he realized that was the place where his brother, Esau, had settled. His spiritual struggles came to a climax as he nervously prepared for a meeting with Esau.

He sent out messengers, who reported Esau coming with four hundred men. Fearing death, he exhibited humility for the first time in a prayerful plea to God. Then he prepared gifts for Esau and planned a buffer of livestock, servants, and family between him and his brother as he approached. He sent them across the Jabok River and then he lay down to sleep alone (vv. 22-23). However, he did not sleep that night. "A man wrestled with him till daybreak" (v. 24), dislocating

Jacob's hip (v. 25).

A New Name (Gen. 32:26-29). Finally, dawn came, with neither Jacob nor the man winning. The man asked Jacob to let him go. Jacob refused, asking for a blessing (v. 26). The man asked Jacob's name (v. 27) and said, "You'll no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome" (v. 28). Imagine Jacob's surprise that the wrestler was God! The name Jacob meant "usurper," an apt name for one who had been born as a twin holding his older brother's heel and had stolen his brother's birthright and blessing (Gen. 25:26, 33; 27:27-29). His new name, Israel, signified a struggle with God (v. 28). Before he left, the wrestler gave Jacob a blessing.

An Aftermath (Gen. 32:30-32). Whenever we have an

encounter with God, we face a crisis. We must make a decision of what we will do in response to him. Jacob's response was to name this place Peniel, "the face of God" (v. 30). Before, when Jacob had struggled, he had failed to realize the importance of a relationship with God. He could not even admit he needed God. After this encounter, Jacob began to grow in spiritual maturity. Like us, Jacob's spiritual growth involved great struggle, but he discovered new dimensions of God's blessing. He did not give up, but was persistent in asking for the blessing. He lived a reverent, changed life after he met God face to face. As we struggle, we must be persistent as we ask for his blessings. Then we must live a changed life as a result of our relationship with him.

Ellison is a consultant in the Miss. Woman's Missionary Union.

FAMILY BIBLE SERIES

Living in Victory

1 John 5:1-12

By Debbie Sills

The Verifying Love (5:1-3). The overwhelming message of 1 John has been God's love for mankind and our love for others. Christians have a responsibility to show love to others. Our actions should reflect the love God has given to us. Verse three has an unusual statement that needs to be understood clearly. John states that God's commandments are not burdensome. He of course is referring to the commandments to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul, and to love others as we love ourselves. John is not saying that obedience to these commandments is easy for a person to achieve simply because he is a Christian. On the

contrary, it is never easy to love someone we do not like or who does not love us back. Living in harmony with one another is virtually impossible in today's world. Values and morals vary greatly and our human capacity to love others is too incomplete to fulfill these commandments on our own. God wants to love others through us. He wants us to love him and allow his love to flow through us to those around us. His love is what makes the impossible possible. We can not humanly love others with divine love. Only God can do that through us.

Think about things you do for your spouse, children, or family. Would some of these things be



Sills

burdens for you if they were for a total stranger? A burden ceases to be a burden when love is involved. It is easy to do things out of love for our family — people we know we love. However, it is more difficult to do these same things out of love for a stranger. We

need to remember that we are a part of a larger family — the family of God. God does not make the commandment to love less difficult. Instead, he provides us the strength and courage we need to love others.

The Overcoming Faith (5:4-5). In verse four, John tells us that Christians have victory over the world. The victory comes from our faith in Jesus. If we believe God cared enough for man to leave his throne and come down to earth to suffer, be rejected, and die, then our faith has its beginning. Having faith means believing Jesus is the Son

of God and understanding he already knows everything that will ever happen to us. Our faith in Christ gives us the ability to stand up to a world of discouragement and defeat. Having the knowledge that God is in ultimate control of our lives and wants the very best for us helps us face our society of evil. Our faith is the key to overcoming temptations and despair. However, we need not be dismayed at the size of our faith. Quantity does not matter to God. Our faith is magnified through Christ. Regardless of how small our faith, Jesus gives us the strength to go on living day to day.

The Assuring Witness (5:6-12). In these verses John refers to the witness of the water and blood. What John is dealing with here is the establishment of the Messiahship of Jesus. The witness of the water refers to the baptism of Jesus when the Spirit descending upon Jesus confirm-

ing his deity. The blood refers to the life given by his sacrifice on the cross. The Spirit, water, and blood all point to the perfect Savior. Believing in this Savior is what assures us of eternal life — a life that begins when we become a Christian, not after we die. We experience eternal happiness and joy today, not just after our life is over here on earth.

Believing in Christ as the Messiah means much more than accepting what he says is true; it calls for a commitment for us to place our lives in his hands. Once we do this our lifestyle will reflect that commitment. Have you accepted Christ as the Savior of the world and the personal Savior of your life? Does your life reflect a commitment to Christ? Can others around you see your commitment to Christ? All you need to do is commit your life to Christ and accept his free gift of eternal life.

Sills is advertising coordinator for The Baptist Record.

LIFE AND WORK

God's Missionary Call

Acts 13:1-3; 14:26-27; 26:15-19; Gal. 2:7-10

By Don Lum

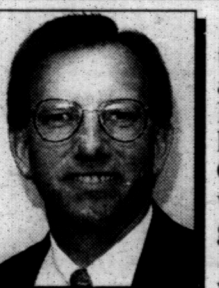
What is a missionary? Webster says it is a person sent to convert the heathen or unbelievers. Unbelievers are everywhere. Some are mine and your neighbors and some are in China and other distant lands. As we get to know and follow Christ with our lives, we will share with others. We can't help it, if we really have our Father's heart. We want to be obedient to him and we will love others. In that sense, all of us are missionaries.

Every believer is called to missions, but that is not what this lesson is about. This lesson deals with God calling people to go away from familiar surroundings and share

the good news where there is not a church on every corner.

We will look at Paul, who is often referred to as the first missionary, and see some characteristics of his ministry. As we study, remember there are unbelievers all around our world and God is still calling people to go. Could he be calling you?

Missionaries are Called (Acts 26:15-19; Gal. 2:7-10). This first passage is Paul's defense before Agrippa. It is his personal testimony. After many years of service to the Lord, Paul is recalling how he met God and what God told him to do. It is the story of a call to missions, a story that is still being repeated today in many lives.



Lum

In verse 16 he is told that he is being appointed a minister and a witness. In verse 17, Jesus tells him he will be sent to the Gentiles. Paul's calling was to a specific people group.

His mission is stated in verse 18. Examine it carefully. It is your mission as you come into contact with unbelievers where you are, and it is also your mission if God is sending you to another group of people.

The mission is simple — to open their eyes. Why? So that they may turn from darkness to light; from Satan to God; to receive forgiveness and an inheritance. There was spiritual blindness in the world of Paul. There is still spiritual blindness in our world.

Paul knew what he was called to do. It was his focus and his goal. It is what drove him all his life.

In the Galatians passage, Paul restates his call to the

Gentiles, the uncircumcised, and also refers to the time the church leaders reaffirmed him in his call and asked him to remember the poor as he went.

Missionaries are Commissioned (Acts 13:1-3). This is a wonderful passage describing a church listening to and being obedient to the Holy Spirit.

While they were worshipping the Lord and "fasting," the Spirit led them to set apart Paul and Barnabas and send them out. The church obediently became the hands and mouth of the Spirit to encourage and pray for these two whom God had called.

The church is still the hands and mouth of the Spirit encouraging and praying for those God has called and sent out into the world.

Missionaries are Connected (Acts 14: 26-27). This last passage describes another part the local church should play in connection with the "missionary." Here we see Paul report-

ing to the church what God had done through them among the Gentiles. We do need to hear from our missionaries so we can better pray for them and minister to them. Many times God uses these report times to speak to others.

During this season of prayer for International Missions and the receiving of the Lottie Moon Offering, every church needs to hear again the stories of missionaries around the world. When Christian people hear what God is doing, Christian people are motivated to pray and give.

Conclusion. As this new year begins, these are a few things you can do. Pray for specific missionaries. Get to know a missionary this year personally.

Finally, be aware of what God is doing in your own life. Just like what Paul experienced in his life, you might experience in your own. He still calls!

Lum is a consultant in the Miss. Baptist Evangelism Dept.

THE VILLAGE VIEW

The Baptist Children's Village



Ronny E. Robinson, Executive
Director
P.O. Box 27,
Clinton, MS 39060-0027
(601) 922-2242

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Mr. & Mrs. Iverson McKey
Bobby Partridge
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Taylor
Genell Taylor
Milton E. Pell
Doris Brown
Sonny & Jackie Lewis
Thomas & Cecelia Riley
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Mrs. Grafton Pickle Jr.
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Rev. & Mrs. Harold B. Harris Jr.
Mrs. Clara Smith
Mr. & Mrs. S. S. Crocker
Mrs. Joy Smith
Mr. & Mrs. Joe H. Cleveland
Mrs. Lavada Smith
Concord Baptist Church
Mr. & Mrs. Luther Roy Adams

As this centennial year of the Baptist Children's Village ministry draws to a close, we thank you for your friendship, good will and gifts that have made these 100 years possible. We sincerely wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas and all the happiness that a prosperous New Year can bring. We look forward to another 100 years made possible by friends like you.

BCV Staff and Children

Medical machine marks ministry milestone

By Chris Potts
Baptist Press Correspondent

CHANDLER, Ariz. (BP) — For many Southern Baptists, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions has become a vague, if hallowed, tradition, a different-colored envelope in the pew rack, about the time the weather turns cold.

For Doug Derbyshire — a Southern Baptist International Mission Board medical missionary to Thailand — the offering is something much more tangible.

It's the ultrasound machine standing in a corner of the spartan hospital where he works — and it's all the lives that machine has let him impact for eternity.

"Lottie Moon directly affects what we do," says Derbyshire, currently on furlough in Chandler, Ariz. "Lottie Moon offerings bought our hospital an ultrasound machine, and it has helped me immensely.

"Within seconds," Derbyshire says, of using the machine for the first time, "peo-

ple were coming from hundreds of miles." Getting people in the door, he says, means everything for a medical missionary — not just for the chance to treat their ailments and pains, but for a chance to present the gospel in a clear, unmistakable way.

That's why when Derbyshire hears "Lottie Moon," he so often thinks of Sarin.

When Sarin came to the Baptist hospital with intense belly pain, the new ultrasound machine revealed gallstones. The doctors removed his gallbladder, and — once he had recovered — shared Jesus with him.

"He said, 'I have been here five days,'" Derbyshire remembers. "'What ceremony can I do so I can become a Christian?'" "There is no ceremony," I told him. "You just ask Christ into your heart."

"I'll do that right now," he said.

"Now, Sarin had never prayed before. So he just prayed, looking me square in the eye: 'God, from this day on, you will be my boss, and I will be your slave.'"

Looking around, Derbyshire noted most of the other patients were listening intently as he and Sarin talked about the Thai man's newfound faith.

"He wanted to know, 'What can I do, what can't I do?' He said, 'There is no church in my village. There are no Christians in my village.'"

That absence of other believers is an enduring fact of life for Christians in Thailand, says Doug's wife, Cheryl — and the absence is especially keenly felt at Christmastime.

"It's not as festive," she says. "Christmas is a regular day. Everybody goes to work. Only the Christians celebrate."

That tends to keep the celebrations sparse. The Derbyshires' church has something approaching 120 members — and it's the only congregation in a province of 60,000.

If the celebrants are few, the Christmas spirit is deeply,

refreshingly genuine.

"For the Thai (believers)," Cheryl says, "Christmas is a true celebration of Christ's birth — everything's focused on that."

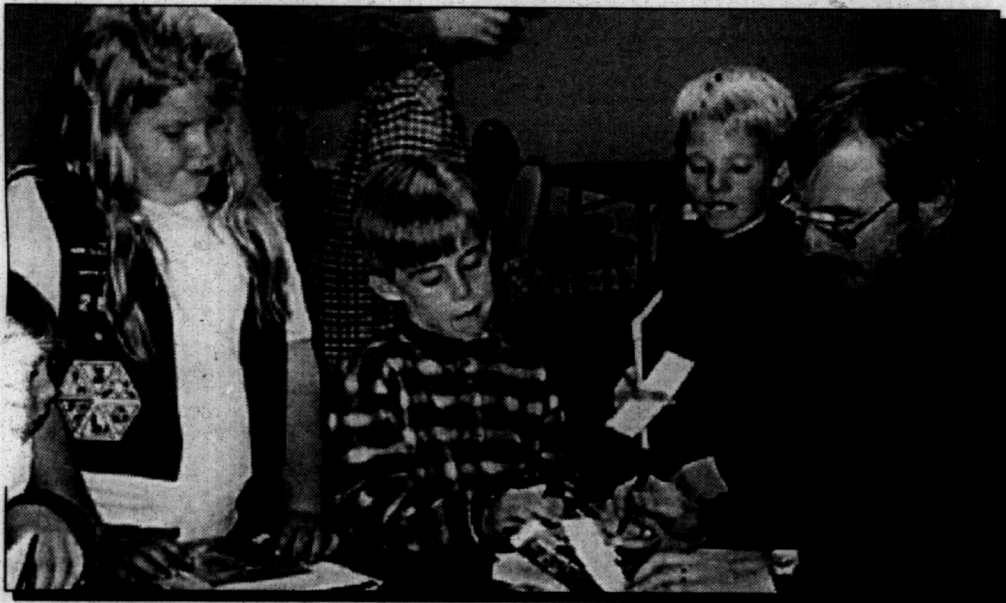
"Among the Christians, there is no distraction from materialism," Doug says. "It is not a store holiday. It is a faith holiday. People have a great joy with this date ... and the birth of our Lord binds Christians together."



Dear Pen Pal Club,

My name is Christy Coleman. I am 10 years old. I'm in 4th grade. I like basketball, soccer, Super Nintendo, computers, Camp Tick-A-Witha, and I love horses. I have short brown hair and I attend West Heights Baptist Church. I love to write people. I hope I find a pen pal soon.

Please write to:
430 West Reynolds
Pontotoc, MS 38863



CELEBRATING BOOKS — The Library Committee of the First Baptist Church of Brookhaven celebrated National Children's Book Week on November 19 by inviting Earnest Herndon, author of the Eric Sterlin Detective Series, to speak to the Royal Ambassadors (RAs) and Girls in Action (GAs). After speaking and answering many questions, Herndon autographed books and bookmarks. (BP special photo)



Ron Mumbower, Ph.D.
Minister of Counseling
First Church, Jackson

LifeAnswers

Our eight-year-old boy is still wetting the bed about once a week. We know he will outgrow this, but when?

I've always heard, "Don't judge a child by his parents." True?

You are correct that he will outgrow his bedwetting. The best action you can take is to not make a big deal out of this — you don't want to shame him and cause psychological scarring. This is a matter of bladder control and physical maturity, not poor parenting. Monitor his liquid intake in the evening and make sure he goes to the bathroom at bedtime. Take him to the bathroom again before you go to bed. Make it his responsibility to help you take the wet sheets off the bed and replace them with clean ones. Use this as a teachable moment to instill in your child responsibility and self-discipline. If you are concerned that there may be a medical problem, consult your son's doctor. Mainly, you should relax and praise the good nights when he doesn't wet the bed. If you approach the problem in a loving, Christian manner, this situation will correct itself and you will see all systems begin to work together.

Each child is a work of God, "fearfully and wonderfully made." (Ps. 139:14). The Bible contains many stories of people who turned out good despite poor parenting, and also people who didn't turn out so good despite excellent parenting.

As Christians, we must look upon each person as an individual and avoid prejudging anyone on the basis of their past. We must also affirm good behavior and seek to correct and encourage those who are "acting out" with bad behavior.

Recall that Jesus had one follower who betrayed him, one who denied him, and nine others who simply weren't there. How did Jesus react to their conduct?

Parents don't always turn out as we (and their children) wish. Our job as Christians is to pray for the people in these unfortunate situations and reach out to help such children grow up to be strong and mature Christians.

Send your counseling questions to LifeAnswers c/o The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Please be brief. Name is not required. Remember: in time of crisis, your pastor can make recommendations on your counseling needs.

Bibliocipher

By Charles Marx
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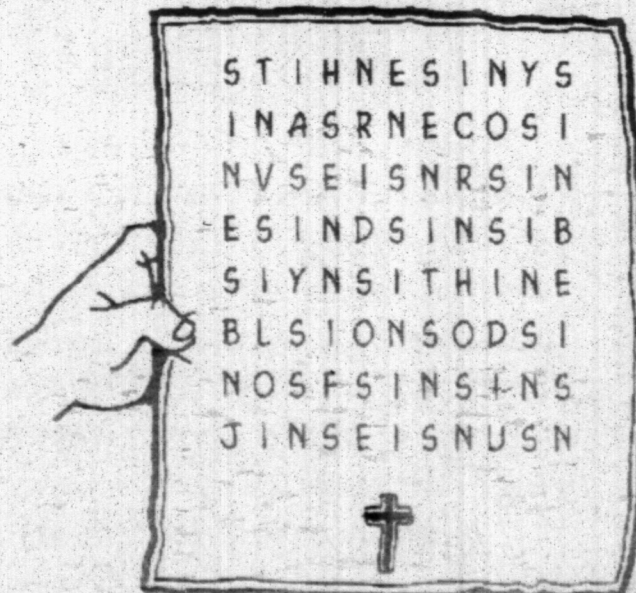
JCAQXL ETX: KCDJ

Clue:

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: John 3:16.

DISAPPEARING ACT!

When we decide to become followers of Christ and give our lives to Him, the Bible says He forgives our sins and remembers them no more (Heb. 8:12). How can that happen? The sins just disappear! Where do they go? The answer is hidden in this grid of letters. Cross out every letter S, I, & N except the last two S's! Then copy the left-over letters in order in the spaces below.



Source: Solving Bible Mysteries by Joy MacKenzie. (Zondervan, 1994), available at your local bookstore or by calling 800-727-3480.

Check your answer by reading 1 John 1:7 and 1 Peter 1:18-19